

General education curriculum reforming advance in the universities of China mainland

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Abstract: From 21st century, in order to pursue “Quality-oriented Education”, enhance students’ overall quality and broaden their knowledge vision, some key universities in China mainland have reformed the general education curriculums successively. This article introduces the reforming advance of general education curriculum in the universities of China mainland.

Key words: China mainland; general education; curriculum reforming

1. Introduction

In the middle of 20th century, though the universities and colleges of Chinese Mainland carried out “quality education”, many students majoring in science and technology couldn’t write a readable and fluent article while students majoring in liberal arts couldn’t understand classic literature,. From this century on, some key universities in China mainland have reformed the general education curriculums successively for the purpose of pursuing “Quality-oriented Education”, enhancing students’ overall quality and broadening their knowledge vision.

Before the reforming, the general education mainly included political theory, ethics training, military theory, physical education, English and computer science, etc. These curriculums are the required course set by the education ministry. Besides those required courses, no general education optional courses were set in most universities after the reforming. The optional course of general education consists of two parts. One is general education core curriculum, which was basically modeled on Harvard’s core curriculum. For example, the general education optional course in Beijing University is divided into five fields as social science, language literature and arts, mathematics and natural science, history and culture, philosophy and psychology, altogether more than 300 courses are offered. Every student must complete 16 credits’ general education curriculum, and each field should be occupied to at least 2 credits. The language and arts field should occupy 4 credits. General education curriculum in Wuhan University is divided into 5 fields as humanities, social science, mathematics and natural science, civilization both in China and abroad, interdisciplinary area, etc. offering more than 200 courses. Students are required to complete at least 2 credits in each field with a total minimum credit of 12. Another kind of general education curriculum is arbitrary optional course. In Beijing University, the arbitrary optional course has no credits. Students could choose them freely. In Wuhan University, there are more than 300 arbitrary optional courses for students to select according to their interests, but the minimum credits should be no less than 4.

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Table 1 General education curricula of Beijing University

Types	Names						Notes
Compulsory Courses	principles of Marxism, general theories of MAO Ze-dong's thoughts, DENG Xiao-ping's thoughts and "Three Representatives", morality and law, outline of Chinese recent history, military theory, physical education, English, fundament of computer Science						set by the ministry of education
Elective Courses	courses set by university (ccore)	field of social sciences	field of language literature and arts,	field of maths and natural sciences	field of history and culture	field of philosophy and psychology	every student must get 2 credits at least in every field and should also get 4 credits from the field of language literature and arts. The total credits are 16.
	optional courses elected by students						no credits

Table 2 General education curricula of Wuhan University

Types	Names						Notes
Compulsory Courses	principles of Marxism, general theories of MAO Ze-dong's Thoughts, DENG Xiao-ping's Thoughts and "Three Representatives", morality and law, outline of Chinese Recent History, military theory, physical education, English, fundament of computer science						set by the ministry of education
Elective Courses	courses set by university (core)	field of the humanities	field of social sciences	field of maths and natural sciences	field of Chinese civilization and foreign civilization	Interdisciplinary field	every student must get 2 credits at least in every field. The total credits are 12.
	optional courses elected by students						at least 4 credits

In China mainland, it is comparatively scientific that the general education curriculum consists of general education core curriculum and arbitrary optional course because it makes students have more choices of their own. It is more scientific and reasonable to implement the general education to the students than the way only by core curriculum. The core curriculum is emphasized on knowledge integration, which requires to be offered from the angle of interdisciplinary, and strict curriculum requirements for teaching limit some courses entering into the core curriculum. This single core curriculum is without doubt restricting students' choices of knowledge and development. We can't only rely on offering more core curriculum to change this situation because it would hold up the quality of general curriculum if more core curriculums offered without restriction. Core curriculum is defined as restricted optional course, which is selected by many students. The number of the course should be limited so that students could have a better choice of high quality courses. For these reasons, it is necessary to develop some other kinds of general curriculum to add up to the lacking of core curriculum and to satisfy students' different interests.

There are still some problems in the curriculum construction of general education in the universities of China mainland.

2. The problems in the curriculum construction of general education

2.1 The standard is indefinite in the dividing of general education core curriculum

In China mainland, the general education core curriculum in the universities is usually divided into 5 to 6 fields with the reference of Harvard's core curriculum, and there is no other dividing standard. In Beijing University, the core curriculum is divided into five fields as social science, language literature and arts,

mathematics and natural science, history and culture, philosophy and psychology. In Wuhan University, it is divided into 5 fields as humanities, social science, mathematics and natural science, civilization both in China and abroad, and interdisciplinary area while in Fudan University, the general education core curriculum is divided into social science and behavioral science, humanities and arts, natural science, medical science and pharmacy, foreign languages and physical education, etc. In South and West Finance and Economics University, the core curriculum is divided into 6 areas as philosophy social science, culture and language, natural science, history, art physical culture, physiology and psychological health, etc. There is no every and scientific reason why the core curriculum should be divided in this way but not that way. The dividing evidence is full of arbitrary. Besides, as the field is divided into such a narrow way that the boundary line of each field is not so clear. Some curriculum can be brought into this field as well as that one. Therefore, how to improve the dividing standard of general education core curriculum is a topic warranting further studying.

2.2 The quality of general education core curriculum needs improving

Nowadays, many general education curriculum teachers in the universities in China mainland regard general education curriculum as a course simply introducing the basic knowledge of each discipline. General education curriculum is misunderstood as a basic stage of a speciality or as popular courses. This view makes general education curriculum teaching to be a kind of knowledge transmitting. General education teachers haven't focused their attention on the spirit and method of this discipline. Some teachers even neglected the basic theories and frames to present the popularity of the course only for the purpose of attracting more students. For example, in the course of "language and culture", some teachers just played some video episodes of foreign local conditions and customs and gave some explanation in English to take for granted that students might understand the foreign culture on the one hand and practiced their listening comprehension on the other hand. In fact, either the knowledge range or the depth is absent in such kind of general education course, and only the hasty and casualty were left to the students. Such kind of teaching obviously couldn't achieve its original teaching aim. In a word, the essence of general education is not only the knowledge transmitting, but the methods of students' analyzing and solving the problems from multi-subjects and multi-angles.

2.3 The general education curriculum teachers' building work should be strengthened

General education level in a university largely depends on its general education teachers' level. General education has been carried out difficultly because the requests for general education teachers are much higher than that for the speciality teachers. General education teachers should possess comparatively higher speciality scholarly level, wider breadth of knowledge along with the awareness, methods and ability of analyzing and solving problems with different knowledge. At present, fewer teachers could live up to the expectation, while teachers tallying with the requirement may not be so willing to give general education courses. On the other hand, when the university selects general education teachers, most teachers are only chosen from inside the university, without the combination and cooperation of the teachers from other universities. In a word, the general education curriculum teachers with higher level are seriously deficient in the universities of China mainland, and teachers' entire level remains to be improved.

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